

Committee on Resources

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Statement of Gene Rurka
Chairman, Humanitarian Services Committee
Safari Club International

Before the

Subcommittee on Fisheries, Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

April 10, 2003

Remarks in favor of "The Disabled Sportsmen Access Act"

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of this committee. Thank you for granting me the opportunity to speak to you today. I am here to speak in support of the Sikes Act, particularly as it relates to the disabled sportsmen.

I speak to you today not as a person with a disability, but rather as one who has been actively involved with the physically handicapped and challenged individuals for numerous years. During my high school and college years, I lived with and cared for an amputee. I have seen and been actively involved in the unique needs and the challenges of a wheelchair bound, physically handicapped person.

As chairman of the Humanitarian Services Committee for Safari Club International/Safari Club International Foundation, I have the responsibility for all of our humanitarian programs for physically challenged individuals, and have been extremely active in all of them. One of these programs, the Special Hunter Program, sparked the development of the Pathfinder Award. This award honors those handicapped and disabled individuals who have demonstrated the ability to overcome challenges and obstacles that so often prevent them from enjoying life's opportunities.

Not only have I had extensive involvement in the development of photography, shooting and fishing apparatus for quadriplegics and paraplegics, I have also been fortunate to have initiated numerous opportunities for our disabled sportspeople to enjoy the outdoors through the use of private facilities provided by the numerous men and women of our sport hunting community. We can make a difference.

We now need the access and the property to provide our physically handicapped veterans and individuals with a chance to enjoy the recreational opportunities of the great outdoors. It is with this in mind that I endorse the efforts of this committee to permit access for our handicapped and disabled veterans and individuals to utilize military facilities for sporting opportunities.

This legislation fulfills many needs.

1) It promotes the opportunity for the government, through the Department of Defense, to partner with private organizations to construct facilities and operate programs for sportspeople with disabilities at NO COST TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

2) This legislation allows the Department of Defense to accept donations of materials and volunteers for the construction of facilities accessible to sportsmen and women with disabilities.

This partnership between the Department of Defense and the private sector has been a great success in the past and can be seen in operation at the Quantico Marine base in Virginia.

3) The Disabled Sportsmen Access Act will provide increased opportunities for many disabled American sportsmen and women to overcome the obstacles of their handicap. By giving them access to this unique part of our country they can now enjoy and fulfill the adventures of the outdoors, which you and I sometimes take for granted.

The United States Federal lands are a part of America's heritage and part of its living legacy to all its citizens, including disabled sportsmen and women.

I hope you will vote in favor of this legislation and I thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

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